

THE STUDY OF MAN

THE MIND OF MAN: SOVIET VIEW

"Normal" and "Abnormal" in the USSR

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IN 1946 the Central Committee of the Russian Communist party called upon Soviet psychology "to expose the reactionary character of psychological theories now current in America and Western Europe, to free itself of all harmful foreign influences and to imbue its scientific work with a true Bolshevik spirit." This call, naturally, did not go unheeded. The Logic and Psychology Department of the Academy of Social Sciences obediently organized a full-dress denunciatory examination of S. L. Rubinshtein's Soviet textbook, *Foundations of General Psychology*, which had come out in a revised edition in 1946. Until then Rubinshtein had been considered the leading Soviet psychologist, and the few accounts of Soviet psychology in American publications during the 40's had been based chiefly on his work. But now—in the familiar McCarthy manner—Rubinshtein was thoroughly exposed as a rotten compromiser with bourgeois psychology, a

polluter of Soviet science with "reactionary idealist rubbish."

As compared to the silencing of Akhmatova and Zoshchenko in literature in 1946, or to the public humiliation of the "Weissmannist-Morganist" opponents of Lysenko in biology in 1948, Rubinshtein's misfortunes attracted practically no attention in this country. American intellectuals had little interest in Soviet psychology because they supposed—rightly, the attacks on Rubinshtein show—that Soviet psychology as such hardly existed. Marxists have always been very suspicious of individual psychology. It encourages, they feel, egotism, subjectivism, idealism, and biologism; it considers the individual apart from society or supposes that the basic patterns of individual development are the same in all societies. "Marxism," J. B. S. Haldane wrote in his *Marxist Philosophy and the Sciences*, in 1939, "has extremely little positive to say about the individual mind." Society and nature, Marxists observe, are prior to the individual and vastly greater. They provide both the content and forms of his thought. Every hour of the day external reality, with its rewards and punishments, tests or modifies the character of his thinking. Human consciousness is a social product; it has developed through social experience; it manifests itself to others through social acts; it can be significantly changed only through changes in social relations.

For Marxians, individual acts can be profitably considered only in terms of their social consequences and social origins. A man's own notions of why he behaves as he does are bound to be wrong unless he is a scientific socialist, in which case his motives are not individual or subjective. The wrongness of

WHAT can be the function and character of the sciences of psychology and psychiatry in a society where peace of mind is an obligation of citizenship, and where psychological conflicts and their expression are administratively resolved by fiat, occupational and legal penalties, and, if necessary, shooting? Through the documentation offered by a recent authoritative work, *Soviet Psychiatry* by Joseph Wortis (Baltimore, The Williams and Wilkins Company, 314 pp., \$5.00), ROBERT GORHAM DAVIS here offers a glimpse into one of the arcana of Soviet science. Mr. Davis is associate professor of English at Smith College, and has written for many general and professional periodicals. He was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1908, and studied at Harvard.

the non-socialist sense of the self, and of the self's motives and values, is not individual either, but results from ideology, from the unconscious rationalization, as Engels believed, of class interests. "Morals, religion, metaphysics, and other ideology, together with their accompanying forms of consciousness," Marx and Engels wrote in *The German Ideology*, "therefore no longer present an appearance of independence. They have no history, no development of their own." Bourgeois thinkers could be conscious both of social conditions and of ideas, but not of the way social conditions determined ideas. Truer consciousness of these relations could arise only out of the collective struggle to change conditions. A man could see how conditions determined his ideas only by becoming a scientific socialist—but then he would no longer have the same ideas.

JOSEPH WORTIS's book *Soviet Psychiatry* is the first full American account, based on a wide reading of the Russian texts, of Soviet theory and practice in psychology. One turns to it eagerly, then, to find answers to the psychological questions that still remain even if one accepts—as Dr. Wortis himself does—the basic Marxist assumptions. What measure of autonomy or independence do we still grant the individual psyche or organism in its dialectical give and take with the external world? Does the uniquely determining history, even though it is a social history, of each individual give him a unique pattern of responses to the external world (his personality), which can be understood—and if ill, cured—only in terms of the dynamics of his particular development? What part in this dynamic development of the individual do the mechanisms observed in depth psychology play: introjections, projections, displacements of affect, unacknowledged wishes, regressions, repressions, symbolic acting-out, and the like?

What Dr. Wortis says in the beginning of his book about the dialectic would make one suppose such notions have a place, that ideas of ambivalence, regression, and displacement are perfectly Pavlovian. Dialectically, he says, "opposing forces are always found within single phenomena. Negative and positive, new and old, growing and declining. . . . Interaction between these opposing qualities is part of the movement of natural things and explains their peculiarities of development. From this point of view excitation and inhibition are attributes

of reflex activity and serve to explain the phenomena. . . ."

But since Dr. Wortis's book is a thoroughly "party-partisan" book, he devotes his appendix largely to the attacks on Rubinshtein, since these attacks represent the latest official pronouncements on psychology. And here the questions I raised are answered with appalling and very undialectical finality. The individual psyche is to be granted no independence, no autonomy whatsoever. As with the forms of art and the biologic transmission of inherited characteristics, the human mind is denied any principles of self-determination, any organic integrity, any characteristic functional patterns which permit it, even temporarily, to resist outside pressures or to isolate itself—or any part of itself—as a necessary condition of its development. In itself undialectic, this dogmatism is a response to the historic dialectic of the struggle with the West. The leaders of the Soviet Union cannot stand the idea that there is anything in art, nature, or the human mind within their realms that is not totally responsive to immediate political demands. They have orthodox sanctions for their position, furthermore, in that scornful semantic nightmare, Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, which historic misfortunes have made the basic text in formal philosophy for a third of the world's population, and which sets the tone for Communist intellectual polemics.

THE attacks on Rubinshtein are important—crude, blustering, and dogmatic though they are—because they establish very clearly a controlling pattern. Art, philosophy, science, and politics do not exist by themselves. They are human activities. But what is the nature of the human being who creates them? The definitions of the socialist psyche given by Rubinshtein's critics make much more understandable the logic of "socialist realism" in the arts, or the special relation in Soviet philosophy of social determinism to individual moral responsibility, or the justification for the complete break with the West in the social and natural sciences. One must be grateful to Dr. Wortis for printing in full Chernakov's critique of Rubinshtein, "Against Idealism and Metaphysics in Psychology," even though it is bound to destroy most of the sympathy with Soviet science which his book attempts to create.

The basic Marxist psychological formula, repeated frequently by Wortis and Chernakov,

is a simple one: the psyche is a function of highly organized matter, is brain activity which reflects social or material reality. From this, everything follows. In a pre-socialist society where there are class conflicts, the psyche reflects conflicts; integration is impossible, there are divisions in the soul. In a socialist society there are no class conflicts, and no distinction between individual and social interests—hence no psychic reflection of conflicts, but peace of soul. And in socialist art there is none of the ambiguities or ambivalences to which bourgeois criticism, reflecting its own situations, gives primary importance.

The psyche's reflection of reality is not a simple mirror reflection, however. Psychic phenomena, Chernakov says, "are ideal images, copies, or photographs, the correctness of which is tested and confirmed by practice." An ordinary mirror reflection corresponds to 18th-century empiricism or vulgar materialism or, in literature, to critical or descriptive realism: it does not correspond to "socialist realism." "The writer can give a truthful and profound portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development," a Soviet critic has written, "only if he is guided by the policy of the Soviet state. For on what is this policy based? On the knowledge of the real requirements for the development of the material life of society; on a precise, scientific knowledge of reality and its laws."

The psyche of a socialist citizen may give a distorted reflection of "real reality" for one of two reasons. His brain may not be functioning properly, in which case medical or surgical treatment is necessary. Or he may not have been active enough as a Communist to keep up with the advancing "party-partisan" sense of reality, which truly understands reality exactly in proportion to its success in dominating it. And it is up to the leaders to see that he keeps up, by initiating periodic purges and changes of line in the various arts and sciences. By the laws of dialectics, who does not go forward, goes backwards, and falls into servile acquiescence to bourgeois ideas.

SINCE the psyche is purely a reflection of objective social reality, according to Chernakov, and since social reality in a classless society is totally different from what had gone before, the Soviet psyche is necessarily totally different from the bourgeois or feudal one. "The object of Professor Rubinshtein's study," Chernakov says contemptuously, "is not Soviet

man, who lives under social-economic conditions different from those of capitalist society, but some abstract human personality in general which is so dearly loved by all bourgeois psychologists." Moreover, since understanding in psychology as in other arts and sciences grows out of the Communist struggle to change nature and society, and since the Soviet state has advanced by a revolutionary leap so far beyond capitalist society, Soviet psychologists can learn nothing from bourgeois ones. Western psychologists who support the West against the Soviet Union inevitably reflect this anti-Sovietism and anti-Marxism in their psychological theories. And since no ideas are politically neutral, Soviet psychologists who accept Western concepts are held to be—in objective fact—acting as agents of the enemy. And since emotions, too, according to Chernakov, are reflections of reality, of social danger, for instance, and since morality is a matter of social consequence, the wrathful moral indignation with which people like Rubinshtein are denounced is felt to be perfectly consistent with a belief in determinism.

Those Western psychologists are considered most dangerous who seem closest to Soviet psychology in their mode of approach. "Psychosomatic medicine abroad, particularly in America," an academician named Bykov said at the Pavlov Centennial Discussions in 1950, "where monopoly capitalism is demonstrating its expansionist tendencies in the most brazen manner, has been forced to defend the interests of the ruling class with all the most reactionary theories at its disposal. The mouthpiece of those reactionary theories is the *American Journal of Psychosomatic Medicine*." What was reactionary, for Bykov, was the idea of man as motivated by instincts and aggressive impulses which are, to a considerable extent, repressed by society, but thereby intensified and made the breeding ground for neuroses.

Rubinshtein was accused of having similar ideas. He had been guilty of writing: "Actually it is not only the intellect that plays a part in man's psyche, and in the motives of human behavior—far from it: an essential part is also played by drives and emotional tendencies which often come into sharp conflict with the consciousness of man, and in influencing his behavior give rise to severe upheavals." The dialectical materialist, on the contrary, according to Chernakov, "must without any reservation acknowledge that the psyche is a reflec-

tion of the outside world." Rubinshtein had also written: "The consciousness of a concrete living person—consciousness in the psychological and not in the ideological sense of the word—is always as though submerged in a dynamic, not quite assimilated experience, which creates a more or less dimly illuminated background with changeable and indefinite contours, from which consciousness emerges, without ever breaking away from it." For Chernakov such a description "drags into Soviet psychology a theory borrowed entirely from Freud, Lewin, and other no less reactionary bourgeois idealist psychologists, the so-called theory of the unconscious mind which, despite the clever device of mentioning the 'organic substratum' still remains completely mystic."

It is intolerable to suppose that Soviet workers go around with a lot of anti-social ideas in their unconscious. In the Soviet Union, therefore, the unconscious does not exist.

BY ATTRIBUTING an organic origin to emotional and voluntary processes, by stressing the organic rather than the social nature of human feelings, by talking about "drives," Rubinshtein is guilty of coming "close to the Weismannist-Morganist attempts to separate the organism from its surrounding world, to minimize the role of outside factors and to see the source of evolution only in internal factors." Chernakov insists again and again that feelings or emotions, volitions, aspirations, desires, are all conscious reflections of objective reality. Some of these may derive from inner organic needs, but the wish or aim is always conscious and always directed toward reality. "A drive for food cannot come before the sensation of hunger or appear independently of it, otherwise it would amount to mysticism. . . . Our feelings or emotions cannot be non-objective or non-conscious. It is impossible to feel or to experience an unknown something. It is impossible to love or hate an unknown someone for an unknown something." The fact that this impossibility can be empirically observed does not make it any the less impossible for Chernakov, just as certain empirically observable social circumstances in the Soviet Union are impossible subjects for "socialist realism."

Rubinshtein had so retained a concept of individual responsibility, had so far compromised with bourgeois idealism and mysticism, that he even spoke of "personal convictions" in relation to social obligations and norms. "Other-

wise," he said, "the acceptance of social norms on the part of the individual would be a complete formality." The individual "must himself decide what to do, so that his actions would be in accordance with his personal convictions." Rubinshtein hastened to explain that he was not speaking "of subjecting the phenomena of social significance to control by the phenomena of particular and personal significance," but of "the fact that the personal convictions of man, once they become permeated with a socially significant content, thereby perforce become the arbiters of what is obligatory." For Chernakov this is abstract and irresponsible rubbish. He rejects the concepts both of the obligatory and of personal morality. "Ideals as an expression of the obligatory as distinct from the desirable do not and cannot exist in reality." To agree to this, of course, would be to admit the possible existence of a conflict between personal and social interests or desires. And as for personal morality: "It is possible to rise above the bourgeois morality of capitalist society only by using as a basis the morality of the most progressive class—the proletariat. But no matter how much one desires to do so, it is impossible to rise above proletarian morality, because there is no other more progressive than that." For Chernakov personal convictions *as such* can only be false or reactionary; true convictions reflect objective reality, and not the person who holds them.

THE whole weight of this logic is obviously directed against any concepts of individuality or personality. Such concepts simply cannot exist in a Marxian society. This situation is parallel to the problem of individuality for Aristotelian scholastics like Thomas Aquinas. In this doctrine, the "accidents" of individuality occurred only as the perfect "form"—the only "reality"—was imperfectly realized because of the resistance of "matter." In Soviet psychology, ideal reality—Communist reality—corresponds to the scholastic form, and it is reflected alike in all minds except as the material brain reflects it imperfectly.

This, too, is perfectly orthodox if one remembers Engels' definition of the "leap to freedom" which comes with the organization of a socialist society. In a class society, according to Engels, no one's will is free because it is in conflict with other wills. Men do not make their own history. "History makes itself in such a way that the final result always arises from

conflicts between many individual wills, of which each again has been made what it is by a host of particular conditions of life." In a class society history works unconsciously, Engels says, and without volition. "For what each individual wills is obstructed by everyone else, and what emerges is something no one willed."

But a socialist society is free, that is, rationally controllable through the scientific recognition of necessity, since there is no conflict of wills. All wills reflect the same reality, not the mere empirical reality of vulgar materialism or bourgeois literary "realism," but "party-partisan" reality revealed to the most advanced leaders politically in the course of their struggle to change society. To introduce any principles of indeterminacy, therefore, as Rubinshtein did by suggesting that there could be significant individual choice based on personal conviction, is to destroy freedom. This identification of freedom with the total negation of any indeterminacy or spontaneity is the consistent governing principle behind "socialist realism" in literature, single-slate elections in politics, Michurinism in genetics, and the reflection-of-reality theory in psychology.

STILL, something does go on inside the individual. How does Soviet psychology get from the experimental physiology of neural reactions to the processes of rational cognition and to the logic and modes of thinking which are the presuppositions of all science? How does it structurally relate the two parts of the standard Soviet definition of mind: that it is a function of highly organized matter and that it reflects objective reality? The semantics of the word *reflection* are never discussed. The first part of the definition refers to Pavlovian reflexes—reflexes of an organic, not a mirror-image kind—and the second part refers to Chernakov's "ideal images, copies, or photographs." The passages cited in Dr. Wortis's book deal with this question only in a general and mostly political way.

Obviously, one wishes to say in protest against these generalizations, the developing psyche of the child does not reflect all of reality at once, but only the realities of nursing, of diaper-changes, etc. Its first reflections of social realities are of the restricted and particular social realities of its particular family circumstances. These early experiences create conditioned organic responses, resulting from associations of similarity or contiguity, emotional

associations which provide the metaphors and metonymies, the ambivalences and symbolic transferences of poetry and religion. Freud examined these associations subjectively through analysis; Pavlov created something like them experimentally in his dogs. As the child develops into the man, becomes more mature, more conscious, more fully human, he is always in active, adaptive relationship to external reality. But always selectively, uniquely in terms of his own particularly conditioned history as an organic individual, in terms of a developing, dynamic pattern of responses, which, like the patterns of social institutions, can be understood only in terms of its history. The future grows out of the relation of present to past, and the past lives on, constantly modified, in the present.

But such an analysis of dynamic development is entirely ruled out in Soviet psychology. Soviet psychologists, says Kolbanovskii, another of Rubinshtein's critics, "fully realize the perversity of a functional analysis of the psyche." They are warned against it, just as literary critics are warned against a functional study of literary forms which suggest that literature reflects reality in a different way and toward a different end than politics or the natural sciences. This anti-functional position in psychology is still not considered inconsistent with devotion to Pavlov as the great materialist psychologist. But Pavlov is now held to be an opponent of Mendel-Morgan-Weissmann, because his teachings show "that the evolution of unconditioned reflexes is indivisibly connected with the evolution of conditioned reflexes, coming constantly into being in the process of the animal's adaptation to the conditions of existence." Bykov said that Pavlov's interest in cortical regulation played an exceptional role "in the development of Soviet creative Darwinism." (These quotations are taken from the reports in the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*.) Pavlov's importance is now held to lie in his having shown that all vitally important functions of an organism are regulated by the cortex of the great hemispheres, including the restoration of disordered functions of an injured organism. Soviet psychologists, Wortis says, accord a "high dignity" to consciousness. It is the latest and most fully organized product of the evolutionary process. And the descriptions of the way in which this most advanced and most recent part of the organism controls the rest are an obvious parallel to the total control of society

by the most advanced elements politically in the dictatorship of the Communist party. Academician Speransky is criticized for studying pathological nervous systems "in divorce from the guiding role of the cortex of the great cerebral hemispheres." The cortex, of course, like the Communist leadership, most immediately reflects higher reality, and its direct guidance must always be acknowledged.

In a Soviet society images of reality get distorted or disintegrated only when there is organic impairment of some sort, as a result of fatigue, wounds, or disease, or when, in his conscious thinking, the worker generalizes "unwarrantably" on the basis of particular or personal experience. Cases of the first sort are dealt with purely medically or surgically—and here, of course, Soviet psychiatry is technically very advanced, and has done a great deal of work on organic explanations and treatments of the psychoses. The few reports Wortis gives of cases in which no organic impairment seemed involved are exceedingly unilluminating. No interest whatsoever is shown in the worker's own sense of the realities of his situation or in the history of his psychological development. It is bourgeois idealism to assume that illness is psychogenetic or that responses to past circumstances continue to exert a dynamic role after the circumstances which they reflect no longer exist. In such cases the treatment is mostly symptom treatment; the worker is given some sedatives or tonics; often a change in work or environment is recommended. "Gurevich and Sereiskii think the northern seas are invigorating for depressed patients and recommend the Crimea for states of agitation. 'A calming influence on the nervous system,' they say 'can be obtained from travel on the Volga.'"

Where a worker's ideas are such that they have to be taken account of, they are dealt with either by "reasoning" or in the corrective labor camps of the political police. Since the only cure for unreality is in very immediate productive, cooperative contact with reality, sexual and political deviants alike are sent to cut down trees in Siberia. Wortis remarks that it is the deep Soviet "confidence in the wholesome restorative functions of work which has contributed to some misinformed discussion of 'forced labor camps' in unfriendly circles."

WORTIS'S *Soviet Psychiatry* is an uncritical, clear, informed, wholly "party-partisan" account of the history, techniques, and institu-

tional developments of psychiatry in Russia. Dr. Wortis accepts Russian nationalist perspectives completely, as far as discussion of origins and influences are concerned, says nothing that would not be acceptable in Russia even in its present mood of complete reaction against the West, and prints without demur statements by Russians which accuse American psychologists—on the basis of reference to two articles—of being totally at the service of racialism. Much, however, that Wortis says of child guidance, nursery schools, and the treatment of the war-wounded and insane in Russia sounds good as he reports it. Hospitalization is avoided—from necessity, perhaps—and the mentally ill, under supervision, are given suitable productive work outside institutions whenever possible. They are probably better off than many who decay in idleness in our own crowded, understaffed state institutions. And there is undoubtedly something to what the Russians say about the American social sciences, particularly to what they say about the subjective idealism and mysticism of some depth psychology,* just as there is something to what Russian critics say of the broken image of man, the formalistic inversions, the social and psychological pathology in a good deal of Western literature, both popular and avant-garde.

But what Dr. Wortis's book emphatically demonstrates—if it needed demonstrating—is the iron logic behind Communism's utter extinction of the individual self. This logic is orthodox in theory—it is explicit in Marx, Engels, and Lenin—and it has been appallingly proved and demonstrated in practice. The confessions of opponents of the regime at Communist trials show that by "immediate pressure of the environment," by torture, narcosis, hypnosis, and indoctrination in various combinations, the self's organic past can actually be negated, and that it can be made to "reflect" completely the party-partisan view of reality. Since those who do not come to reflect this reality are considered

*Yet depth psychology and other types of individualist psychology denounced by the Russian critics, it is worth pointing out, form only one of a number of psychological orientations in this country; and even from the point of view of a socially centered psychology and psychiatry, there seems to be no comparison between what American workers have accomplished in the way of sophisticated thinking and solid research—one need only mention the name of John Dewey and the psychiatric school of William Alanson White and Harry Stack Sullivan—and what Russian psychologists have done.

ultimate enemies of the people, there is no moral limit to the use which may be made of these psychological, physical, and medical means of extinguishing the self.

With the destruction of the self and of the structural autonomy of the various arts and sciences, with the disappearance of the shamans and seers, the isolates and introverts, who have contributed so many insights in the past, Marxism pretty well ends the possibility of novelty and spontaneity, of creative discovery and qualitative emergences in the various levels and segments of society. In the long run—if there is a long run—this should work to the advantage of the West. But it is also important to study carefully Engels' sociology of freedom, the Marxist "reflection-of-reality" psychology, to see if it is entirely irrelevant to our situation, to see if a diminishing and narrowing of the self, of individuality, is not also occurring in the West.

The spread of industrialism and egalitarianism has abolished a good deal of the psychic diversity growing out of the individual's immediate productive relations with society and nature. Mass manufacture, mass media, and mass education have made urban exteriors and mental interiors much the same throughout the country. In America in the last two decades, in the government, the trade unions, and the universities, there has been a striking develop-

ment of bureaucratic techniques which enforce conformity. This tendency has been greatly increased, naturally, by the world struggle with Communism, even though that struggle is sincerely made in the name of individual freedom. But much of the manipulative, morale-building, personnel-testing psychology and sociology of adjustment in this country, which puts itself more and more in the service of the government and the foundations, is not really so very different in its premises and purposes from the "reflection-of-reality" psychology of the Russians. A genuine struggle against Russian anti-humanism should require our putting as much effort as we possibly can into discovering what social and political grounds still exist—or can be made to exist—in our contemporary society for the survival of what David Riesman calls the autonomous individual. Neither wholly "other-directed" nor wholly "inner-directed," the autonomous individual is able to live valuably in society and yet be himself. This is possible only when society is of such a character that self-affirming choices are constantly necessary and are felt to make a real difference to society as well as to the self. This is a religious and philosophic question as well as a social one, of course. It is here that the humanities and social sciences can most creatively collaborate, and it is here that their real opposition to the sociology of Stalinist Communism is most crucially tested.